

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

BARBARA VUCANOVICH



STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH



Interview Conducted and Edited by:
Donald B. Seney in 1995
California State University-Sacramento
For the Bureau of Reclamation's
Newlands Project Oral History Series



Interview further edited and desktop
published—2013
By Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian

Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado

SUGGESTED CITATION:

VUCANOVICH, BARBARA. ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW. Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by Donald B. Seney. Edited by Donald B. Seney and desktop published by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation. Repository for the record copy of the interview transcript is the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.

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STATEMENT OF DONATION
OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF
HON. BARBARA F. VUCANOVICH

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Date: 11/9/95

Signed: Barbara F. Vucanovich
BARBARA F. VUCANOVICH

INTERVIEWER: DONALD B. SENEY

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Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

In the case of the Newlands Project, the senior historian consulted the regional director to design a special research project to take an all around look at one Reclamation project. The regional director suggested the Newlands Project, and the research program occurred between 1994 and signing of the Truckee River Operating Agreement in 2008. Professor Donald B. Seney of the Government Department at California State University - Sacramento (now emeritus and living in South Lake Tahoe, California) undertook this work. The Newlands Project, while a small- to medium-sized Reclamation project, represents a microcosm of issues found throughout Reclamation: water transportation over great distances; three Native American groups with sometimes conflicting interests; private entities with competitive and sometimes misunderstood water rights; many local governments with growing water needs; Fish and Wildlife

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Service programs competing for water for endangered species in Pyramid Lake and for viability of the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge to the east of Fallon, Nevada; and Reclamation's original water user, the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District, having to deal with modern competition for some of the water supply that originally flowed to farms and ranches in its community.

The senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation developed and directs the oral history program. Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to the senior historian.

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For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:

www.usbr.gov/history

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**Oral History Interview
Barbara Vucanovich**

Seney: I'm Donald Seney. I'm with
Congresswoman Barbara Vucanovich¹ in her
office in Washington, D.C. Today is
November 9, 1995.

Good afternoon, Congresswoman.

Vucanovich: Good afternoon, Donald. Glad to see you.

Seney: Thank you. Why don't you just briefly tell
me how you got to be a member of
Congress.

How She Became Involved in Politics

Vucanovich: I have volunteered in politics ever since I

1. Republican Barbara Vucanovich, born in 1921, served as a Nevada Member of Congress from January 1, 1983, until January 3, 1997.

can remember, since I was a young woman.

**Worked on Paul Laxalt's Campaigns Beginning in
1964**

One of the people that I helped get elected

over the years was Senator Paul Laxalt.

When he first ran, he ran in 1964 for the

Senate, and I ran his northern Nevada

campaign. He did not win, but later he ran

for governor in '66, and I helped him with

that campaign. I didn't work for him when

he was governor, but he ran again for the

Senate in 1974, and at that time I helped him

with his campaign, and he was elected.

**Ran Senator Laxalt's Northern Nevada Office from
1975 until 1981 or 1982 When She Ran for**

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Congress

I ran his northern Nevada office until 1981
or '82, at which time I ran for Congress.

Seney: And you were first elected in '82?

Elected to the Ninety-Eighth Congress in 1982

Vucanovich: I was elected in '82. That's right.

Seney: And have served since then from northern
Nevada?

Vucanovich: I have been here since then.

Seney: As you know what I really want to talk to
about is the Newlands Project.

Vucanovich: Sure.

Seney: So why don't you tell me when you first
came in contact with the problems of the

Newlands Project.

**First Came in Contact with Newlands Project
Issues While Working for Senator Laxalt**

Vucanovich: I think probably when I was working for
Senator Laxalt when he was senator from
Nevada.

Natural Resources Issues in the West

Those problems, I'm sure, had been going
on long before that, as you well know, with
the tribal agreements and agreements with
TCID [Truckee-Carson Irrigation District]
and the state and the water users and so
forth. We in our office tried to deal with
those things. Then the senator [Laxalt]

worked very closely with Bob Broadbent and some of the other people who at that time were with the Bureau of Reclamation and tried to get some agreements. You'll probably hear, or know, some of those kind of fell by the wayside, but the problems have been going on for seventy-five, eighty, or eighty-five years.

Seney: How do you generally view this controversy? When you look at it as one of the problems in your district and to which you have to pay attention, do you have a kind of general view you take of this problem?

Vucanovich: Well, I think that one of the problems that has happened in Nevada, and it's dealing with any public-land issues, the water users or the people who use the public lands in any way have felt that they pretty much did well with the water, land, and so forth, and without a lot of interference from the government.

“... over the last twenty years ... more and more pressure from the federal government ... have come down pretty hard on a lot of public-land users ... So there have been some feelings in the last probably five or six years that there's a ... war on the West. ...”

But over the last twenty years, maybe,
I think they have felt more and more

pressure from the federal government, and I think people who were in the Bureau of Reclamation or the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] or the [U.S.] Forest Service have come down pretty hard on a lot of public-land users, for whatever reason.

There have been a lot of pressures of all kinds. People think that there's a subsidy involved in some way. So there have been some feelings in the last probably five or six years that there's a really war on the West. And, of course, that's where all the public lands are.

So I've always felt we just need for

people not only to come to the table, but to understand that if they really want to solve some of the problems, some people have to give.

“ . . . we have people particularly in the TCID and the Fallon area who feel they’ve given more than they should. . . .”

One of the problems is that we have people particularly in the TCID and the Fallon area who feel they’ve given more than they should.

Seney: How do you feel about that, Congresswoman? Do you think they have given more or should give more? How do you see that?

**Sees Both the Rural and Urban Perspectives on
Water Issues in Her District**

Vucanovich: It's very difficult. I represent—you know, I live in Reno, so obviously I deal with the municipalities and their use. I just think everybody has to make a real concession, and I don't know. I'm inclined to even be supportive of the people in Churchill County who feel that because of what's happened, the growth in our state, we, federal government and we who represent the government, have taken away a lot of their livelihood and their lifestyle, and I'm very sympathetic to that. But at the same time I

see what's happening in Reno; the growth is there.

So, you know, when you represent almost the entire state, as I do, it's very easy to see everybody's side.

Seney: You have the unfortunate position of representing both these areas . . .

Vucanovich: I do.

Seney: . . . that are competing over the water.

Vucanovich: I do.

Seney: That must be difficult to balance those.

Vucanovich: It is.

Seney: How do you manage that?

Trying to Find a Balance among Constitutents'

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Issues

Vucanovich: Well, you just try to talk to all of them and listen to their concerns and try to find a way to mitigate some of them, but it is difficult. I represent the Indians and the people at Pyramid Lake, so I listen to them, too. Everyone has a case, and it isn't easy.

Seney: I have the enviable position of not having to make a decision.

Vucanovich: That's true.

Seney: I can listen to everyone and enjoy what everyone has to say without having to decide amongst the competing demands. You don't have that luxury, unfortunately.

Vucanovich: That's true.

Seney: One of the times that I guess you had to
make a choice was over Public Law 101-
618.²

2. Public Law 101-618 became law on November 16, 1990. The law contains two acts: The Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribal Settlement Act and the Truckee-Carson-Pyramid Lake Water Rights Settlement Act. The main topics of the legislation are:

- Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribal Settlement Act
- Interstate allocation of waters of the Truckee and Carson rivers.
- Negotiation of a new Truckee River Operating Agreement (TROA)
- Water rights purchase program is authorized for the Lahontan Valley wetlands, with the intent of sustaining an average of about 25,000 acres of wetlands.
- Recovery program is to be developed for the Pyramid Lake cui-ui and Lahontan cutthroat trout
- The Newlands Project is re-authorized to serve additional purposes, including recreation, fish and wildlife, and municipal water supply for Churchill and Lyon Counties. A project efficiency study is required
- Contingencies are placed on the effective date of the legislation and various parties to the settlement are required to dismiss specified litigation.

(continued...)

“ . . . a lot of people in Churchill County . . . were not happy that I helped implement that law [Public Law 101-618], but I think in the long run we did what we thought was right. . . .”

Vucanovich: That is true, and I had a lot of people in Churchill County who were not happy that I helped implement that law, but I think in the long run we did what we thought was right. We brought people from the Department and from all the different groups, the tribes and everyone, together, and the cities and the communities, and the downwater users and the upper water users and so forth. But it's difficult. It's difficult. I jokingly said, after

2. (...continued)

Source is: http://www.usbr.gov/mp/lbao/public_law_101-618.html
accessed on December 7, 2011, at about 2:00 in the afternoon.

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the thing was passed, I said to my staff, I said, “You know, I think if I go down to Fallon, I’d better wear a bulletproof vest,” but I did go down and talk with them.

Seney: So I understand, and my understanding is that they took it out more on Mr. [Bill] Condit, your staff person.

Vucanovich: Oh, they blamed it all on Bill,³ which was – he’s a big guy, he can take it. (laughter)

Seney: Isn’t that what staff are for, too, at times like this? (laughter)

Vucanovich: Sometimes they take a lot of the hits, which is unfair.

3. Bill Condit contributed to Reclamation’s oral history work on the Newlands Project.

Seney: But in my interviews with the people down there, I mean, they knew where you stood on Public Law 101-608.

Vucanovich: Oh, sure.

Seney: This is no secret, of course.

Vucanovich: No, of course not.

Seney: But you had managed to maintain very good relations with them.

Vucanovich: Well, because I'm not afraid to say, "I'm trying to do what's right for you. I have listened to you." And I try to do that, and I continue to do that.

Seney: There was one place in your statement in the 1994 hearings, the April hearings before

Senator [Bill] Bradley's Subcommittee on Water and Power, in your written testimony, and you also mentioned it as you spoke to the committee, was your unhappiness with the tribes' filing of all these abandonment and forfeiture suits. Could you talk a little bit about that?

**Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Filed Suits Regarding
Abandonment and Forfeiture of Water Rights**

Vucanovich: Yes. Gosh, it seems a while back, and I'm not sure, but, you know, it seemed to me that that's piling on. I think that they tried to do things that were just unnecessary. I don't think you need to pile on anybody. Yeah, I

wasn't very happy with them.

Seney: Did you express this to Mr. [Bob] Pelcyger during the meetings with him?

Told Bob Pelcyger How She Felt on the Issue

Vucanovich: I certainly did. I get on many airplanes and I see Mr. Pelcyger⁴ going back and forth, and we're always very friendly, but he knows how I feel, and I told him, sitting here in this office, that I thought he was wrong. I've never been very shy about it. I try and express my opinions. But, you know, you can't just drive people into the ground. I think that's wrong.

4. Bob Pelcyger contributed to Reclamation's oral history work on the Newlands Project.

Seney: As I interview people on the project, I like them very much. They're very kind to me, they welcome me into their homes and have given me many hours of their time explaining their point of view, but as I get to know them – and I tell them this, too – I think it's very hard for them to compromise.

Vucanovich: It is.

Seney: They feel very strongly that they were lured there by the government. They all have the posters on the walls.

Unhappy That TCID Members Felt Her Staff Misled Them

Vucanovich: And a couple of times, meeting with some of

the particularly the TCID people, I've asked my staff to go down and sit and listen to them for hours and work with them, and sit in all the meetings and so forth. They implied that my staff had misled them, and I really was very, very unhappy with that, because that's just not fair. But they feel strongly.

Seney: I can't imagine them saying that without feeling they had some grounds to say it, although in working with your staff in arranging this appointment, they've been very professional, and I'm sure you have great faith in your staff. So what I'm

suggesting is there's a difference of perspective.

Vucanovich: Well, that could have been.

Seney: And a filter through which the people down in the projects . . .

Vucanovich: I think they said, "What would Barbara think or what would Barbara do?" and maybe my staff said, "Well, she'd probably wish you'd get it done, more or less." (laughter)

Seney: Which is probably true.

Vucanovich: Sure. I don't know why they would do that, because I don't think my staff ever misled them. They may have; I'd be very surprised.

Seney: I'm getting at this line of questioning

because I wonder if one of the things you do
is talk to Lyman McConnell and Ted
deBraga and say, "Come on, you guys.
You've got to make an agreement here." Do
you urge them along those lines?

Urges TCID to Try to Come to an Agreement

Vucanovich: I do urge them to try to do that, because
there's just so much water.

**". . . we live in a desert. A lot of people don't want
to accept that, but I think that times do change
and we have more and more growth in all of our
areas, including the Fallon area. . . ."**

Our resources, regardless of what they are,
we live in a desert. A lot of people don't
want to accept that, but I think that times do

change and we have more and more growth in all of our areas, including the Fallon area. You've got to look at reality, but at the same time I'm very sympathetic with these families there. I really am. It's tough. You do what you think is right and try to represent people, and I think I've done that.

Seney: Are you one of those who thinks that maybe if Congress took no more initiatives on this, that time alone would work to shrink the irrigation district?

Vucanovich: Oh, I think there's still some things. Oh, I don't know about that. I think you still have to work through the law and do some of the

things that need to be done, and I think some of those things are happening. It seems to me – I can't remember for sure, but it seems to me that there was an agreement that Reno would have everybody finally on water meters and so forth. It's hard to believe that you don't have them on water meters. So I think that process is taking effect. I'm not one of those who thinks that you just leave it alone and people are going to die off and it's all going to work. I don't think that's fair.

Seney: So there is a place, then, in other words, for congressional initiative.

Vucanovich: I think we need to. I think we need to help

them every way we can, and whatever that takes, I'm always willing to go the extra mile and see what it is.

Seney: Senator Reid went out of his way to pay glowing compliments on your help with Public Law 101-618.

Vucanovich: He has done that consistently, which I appreciate. He's been very supportive that way.

Seney: He made it clear he didn't think it would have gone through without your help, and certainly not against your opposition.

Vucanovich: Well, I'll take that credit. That's very nice.

Seney: He was very glowing in those terms. I know

you submitted a companion bill at the same time.

**Submitted a Companion Bill That Differed from
the Text of Public Law 101-618**

Vucanovich: Yes, I did.

Seney: It had some differences in it.

“ . . . there’s some things that everybody can do, I think. But, you know, some people don’t want to make those changes. . . .”

Vucanovich: Yes, it did. Good heavens, I hate to tell you I can’t even remember now all of the ramifications, but there’s some things that everybody can do, I think. But, you know, some people don’t want to make those changes. They don’t want to line the ditches

or they don't want to do a lot of the things that might have worked. There's a certain amount of groundwater that goes down and gets used and so forth. I'm not a hydrologist, so I don't know all those details, but there are a lot of things that people didn't want to do.

Seney: Which people were these?

Vucanovich: Any of the water users. (laughter)

Seney: I have to ask.

Vucanovich: Sure. Sure.

Seney: You know it and I know that over the years there have been a number of attempts to negotiate around these questions.

Vucanovich: There have.

Seney: And that the general perception is, amongst almost all the parties, that it's been the irrigators who have been unwilling or unable, because there's so many of them and they have difficulty reaching a consensus, unable or unwilling to negotiate with the other parties. Do you see this as a problem in trying to achieve a settlement?

“ . . . it's been hard to get them to agree to come to the table. They think they're justified . . . They want it their way. I think that they continue to feel . . . 'Gee, if we get another administration or if we get other people dealing with it,' but, you know, this has been going on through lots of administrations . . . and you do have all of these things, and there's so many entities that are involved, that it's tough. . . . ”

Vucanovich: Well, you know, it's been hard to get them to agree to come to the table. They think they're justified, a lot of times, in not doing it, and yet right after one thing happened here, they were back in the office the next day. So they want to negotiate. They want it their way. I think that they continue to feel that, "Gee, if we can just keep negotiating, we're going to accomplish our purposes." And I think they think, "Gee, if we get another administration or if we get other people dealing with it," but, you know, this has been going on through lots of administrations. You do have treaties and

you do have agreements and you do have all of these things, and there's so many entities that are involved, that it's tough.

But I look at someone like Betsy Reike [Assistant Secretary for Water and Science] , who worked for the Department [of the Interior] and did her best to get a solution, and they trusted her. I'm talking about the Fallon people. They trusted her, and she worked very hard to see if she couldn't get things solved.

“ . . . some people . . . just think that it's going to change their way of life and they aren't willing to make those moves. . . . ”

But there's still some people who just think

that it's going to change their way of life and they aren't willing to make those moves.

Seney: Did you have much optimism for the settlement to negotiations that ended this last winter without success?

Vucanovich: Yes, I really did. I thought that everybody was getting there, from what I gathered, but I was disappointed.

Seney: I know you dealt at that time directly with the people from TCID and Fallon area.

Vucanovich: Yes, I did.

Seney: They rightly regard you as a friend.

Vucanovich: Oh, there's no question.

Seney: I know they call on you frequently.

Vucanovich: Yes, there's no question.

Seney: There's no misunderstanding there.

Vucanovich: No, there's no question.

Seney: From your contacts with them, then, you had a feeling that maybe this time it was going to be different?

Vucanovich: Uh-huh.

Seney: I know your staff people were there at every meeting and were monitoring this for you.

Vucanovich: They were, yes.

Seney: What did they report to you in the end?

Vucanovich: They reported to me, almost in the end, that, gee, it looked like there was going to be an agreement, and then, of course, it was just

like, you know, the furniture broke. It just didn't happen. I went to bed thinking that it was going to happen, and then the next thing I knew, it had fallen apart.

Seney: I hear varying views on what the impact of the 1994 election was that brought your party to a majority in both houses, that the people out in Fallon took some comfort in that.

How the 1994 Election Affected Newlands Project Issues

Vucanovich: They did.

Seney: Was that your understanding?

Vucanovich: Oh, I think they did, and I think they felt

that, gosh, now that the Republicans were in charge, everything was going to be okay.

But, you know, that isn't factual.

Republicans are not monolithic on any of the issues, and particularly almost everything is based on the bottom line. So we have a lot of new freshmen who think very differently than some of the Republicans who'd been here a long time, and they're not Westerners. They don't concern themselves with the Western issues. But I have had to disabuse their minds that this is not the case. It's, again, politics is local.

We have some Republicans who are

much more concerned about the environment and about corporate welfare and some of these other things that they think, and a lot of them don't understand whatever the Bureau of Reclamation was supposed to do and why we were building dams and so forth. I can't say that they don't have the knowledge, but, you know, they're young, a lot of them have never had that historical background of how the West was solved.

“People in Fallon, . . . think they were guaranteed and they were asked by the federal government to do these things and to be able to develop these areas. . . .”

People in Fallon, they think they were guaranteed and they were asked by the federal government to do these things and to be able to develop these areas. We have a lot of new members who don't have any of that historical background. It's like people who say you should go to war. I mean, you know, they don't know what war is. So you have a generation of people who are here now, who have a very different view of what should happen and what their role is.

Seney: When you said you disabused or attempted to disabuse the Fallon people that there will be change, I have it on what I regard as

excellent authority that you told them
directly, “Don’t expect a change in 101-
618.”

Vucanovich: I did. I did.

Seney: Could you explain, for the people who will
be reading this years hence – you roll your
eyes, but you can do this. Why is it that
101-618 would not be changed now?

**Why she told TCID That Public Law 101-618
Would Not Be Changed**

Vucanovich: If you’re talking about legislation, which is
what would happen . . .

Seney: Yes.

**“ . . . the people who are serving here now . . .
there’s not a lot of sympathy with Western**

problems. . . . I believe that there is a war on the West, and . . . most people just don't understand the needs or the way that the West has been developed. . . ."

Vucanovich: . . . I just don't think that the people who are serving here now would be willing to go back and look at all of these things. I just think there's not a lot of sympathy with Western problems. I can't think of any other way to say it. I believe that there is a war on the West, and I really believe, but it isn't just this administration. I think that most people just don't understand the needs or the way that the West has been developed.

Seney: Let me suggest a prospective on this change

business with 101-618 and see if it makes sense to you. There are a lot of people who are happy with the law. California is happy, Nevada is happy with the allocation of water between the two states. Sierra Pacific [Power Company] is happy.

Vucanovich: Yes, they are.

Seney: The Pyramid Lake Tribe is happy. The Fallon Tribe is happy. Reno, Sparks are happy. You're nodding your head; the tape can't see that, but you're smiling and nodding your head. The only people who are not happy is the people out in Fallon.

“ . . . they are the people who have had the ability

to make a life out there by being able to use the water. Candidly, I mean, that is going to change, and they don't want to accept that . . ."

Vucanovich: Well, I suppose that's true, but again they are the people who have had the ability to make a life out there by being able to use the water. Candidly, I mean, that is going to change, and they don't want to accept that, and I can understand that.

Seney: By change, there just are historical forces at work, in other words.

Vucanovich: Well, sure. There are historical forces, and, you know, we again don't want to lose sight of the fact we have had a seven-year drought. Last year was wonderful, but we

live [in a desert].

Seney: It hasn't rained yet this year, has it?

Vucanovich: No, it hasn't. And we look at an area that cannot count on sufficient rainfall or snow pack, and that's very difficult.

Seney: Let me ask you a sort of parliamentary question, almost. If someone were to put in a bill to undo 101-618, and you objected to it – this is in your district and you objected to it – would that be enough within the rules and the way the House representative works, to put an end to that bill?

Vucanovich: No. (laughter) It would never happen.

Seney: No?

Vucanovich: No. Well, I mean, putting a bill in is one thing, but to pass anything, you have to have 218 people.

Seney: But I'm thinking in terms of the way the House of Representatives works. If something affects your district pretty much, and your district only, obviously there may be some California implications, but two districts at the most, and you and the other member of the House said, "We don't want this. This does us no good," that would be impossible to pass that piece of legislation, would it not?

Vucanovich: Oh, yeah. It would be impossible.

Seney: Given the way the House works.

Vucanovich: Oh, sure. Sure.

Seney: And you're in no mood to tinker with 101-618.

Vucanovich: No, no, I'm not.

Seney: (laughter) You put your hand up as though you're taking an oath there. Okay.

Vucanovich: No.

Seney: It was a very tough piece of legislation to get through, wasn't it?

Vucanovich: Yes, it was very tough, but when you think of how many years have gone by with trying to do things through negotiation and not having anything solved, it really took a lot of

work.

Seney: Could we go back to the interstate compact in 1986?

**Working on Senator Laxalt's Interstate Compact
for the Truckee River in 1986**

Vucanovich: Okay.

Seney: Did you play much of a role in the interstate compact? I know it was Senator Laxalt. It died off in the Senate.

Vucanovich: Yes.

Seney: Did you play much of a role in trying to get that through?

**“ . . . we wanted to help on this side and did
whatever we could. . . . I would say I was kind of
just following, but willing to do whatever it took. .
. . ”**

Vucanovich: Well, again, sure, but Senator Laxalt was really the one pushing it, and we wanted to help on this side and did whatever we could. Actually, the person who was pushing it was Senator Laxalt, and he was the leader, in my estimation, because, you know, he'd been involved in it. He'd been involved in it as the governor and, of course, then when he was in the Senate for twelve years. He just had been part of it. So I guess I would say I was kind of just following, but willing to do whatever it took.

Seney: In a situation like that, again speaking in terms of the way the Congress works, it was

Senator Laxalt's bill to begin with.

Vucanovich: Yes.

Seney: He's pushing it hard. You kind of wait in
the wings, I take it.

**"You can introduce a companion bill, and it
seems to me we did . . . and usually, if you are
both in agreement, you try and do an identical bill.
. . ."**

Vucanovich: Well, you can do a lot of things. You can
introduce a companion bill, and it seems to
me we did, but I'm not sure. Historically I'd
have to go back and look. But that's usually
what you do, and usually, if you are both in
agreement, you try and do an identical bill.
The senator, if it's a senator's bill, he pushes

it, and then it would come over here.

Seney: And you wait for it to come here.

Vucanovich: Wait for it. Sure. But, you know, a lot of times I would introduce a bill and it would go over there, too. It just simply depends upon who's taking the lead. You know, because of our delegation being so small, we literally do things, and try to work together on Nevada issues. But he had worked with – you know, we had Governor [Ronald] Reagan and Senator Laxalt and had worked on these issues, so you really – I can't say take a back seat, but you let – it gets complicated. You have two people on both

sides trying to do identical things, so it's easier if one takes the lead, and then it's very easy to do it on this side.

Seney: The Pyramid Lake Indians had a lot to do with the defeat of that compact.

“ . . . Bob Pelcyger is a very knowledgeable guy. . . . I see him a lot on airplanes, and it isn't just Nevada that he represents. He represents a lot of different Indians. . . . ”

Vucanovich: Yes, they did, and again I don't try and second-guess the Indians. As you know, Bob Pelcyger is a very knowledgeable guy. The thing that's interesting is, I see him a lot on airplanes, and it isn't just Nevada that he represents. He represents a lot of different

Indians. He's been very successful, and he knows the law, and he generates a lot of activities for his own purse strings.

(laughter) But anyway, yeah, he's very able.

Seney: Yes, he is.

Vucanovich: He's very able.

Seney: Yes, there's no question about that.

"I have a great deal of respect for him. I disagree with him 99 percent of the time. . . ."

Vucanovich: I have a great deal of respect for him. I disagree with him 99 percent of the time.

Seney: I think he believes in what he's doing.

Vucanovich: Oh, he does, I'm sure, but he's made a living out of representing Indians.

Seney: Absolutely. A good living.

Vucanovich: A very good living.

Seney: No question about it, yes. I was just wondering if you recall how they may have approached you with this point, with their arguments against the treaty.

Vucanovich: I hate to tell you, I really don't even remember.

Seney: That's quite all right. You've transacted a lot of business and some things may stand out and some may not.

Vucanovich: Yes. I don't remember.

Seney: If it doesn't stand out, they probably didn't come to you a lot.

Vucanovich: And a lot of times, again, because of
whomever is pushing the legislation, you
don't get involved until it's time to make a
move over here.

Seney: Once the interstate compact collapsed and
Senator Reid was elected in the '86
election, they were about simultaneous, the
collapse of getting it through and the
election of Senator Reid, and Senator Reid
then says, and he tells me that he didn't
really give it much thought when they asked
him, "What's your number-one objective?"
He said, "Settle the water wars in northern
Nevada."

**Senator Harry Reid Assigned Wayne Mehl to Work
Northern Nevada Water Issues**

Vucanovich: Yeah, I think he did, he said that, and I think you're right, I think he just said that and hadn't followed it through. But, you know, he did assign someone on his staff, Wayne Mehl,⁵ to actually go out there and try to work these out, and he really got involved and did a marvelous job.

Seney: Well, I know he said to me, and Wayne Mehl has said, too, that Wayne Mehl, at the staff level, and the senator with you, kept you informed of what was going on.

5. Wayne Mehl participated in Reclamation's oral history work on the Newlands Project.

Vucanovich: Oh, they were excellent. They did a very good job.

Seney: How does that work when two members are working together and he's taking the lead, but it obviously affects you?

Vucanovich: Telephone. (laughter)

Seney: The telephone?

“ . . . we [Nevada congressional delegation] talk to each other a lot on issues that affect Nevada. . . .

We've always worked pretty well together on Nevada issues. Obviously we're partisan. . . . but it doesn't make a big difference in an issue that's a Nevada issue. Candidly, every now and then it's important that someone else is getting credit. . . .”

Vucanovich: Yeah. And, you know, we talk to each other a lot on issues that affect Nevada. If I'm doing something that affects him, I very

often call, and I call Senator [Dick] Bryan, too. We've always worked pretty well together on Nevada issues. Obviously we're partisan.

Seney: Yes. Does that make any difference?

Vucanovich: Sure, but it doesn't make a big difference in an issue that's a Nevada issue. Candidly, every now and then it's important that someone else is getting credit. So that's always a problem. [Buzzer sounds.] That's a vote; I've got to go. But if you don't mind who gets the credit, we work very well together. And we do joint press releases and we do joint press conferences and so forth.

So we try to work together.

Seney: It's been said to me that you maybe came kind of reluctantly to the support of 101-618.

Vucanovich: Well, yeah, because again, you know, when I think of all the people I represent – and, you know, there's a tribe in Fallon that had problems. So there are a lot of – yeah, I've got to go. There are a lot of entities that were involved. I came reluctantly, but knowing that it was the right thing to do. I met with many, many people from Reno, the power company and so many of the people who were involved in that, and these were

people I knew very well and who felt that
they had worked and tried to do the best that
they could.

Seney: Can you give me five more minutes?

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. NOVEMBER 9, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. NOVEMBER 9, 1995.

Seney: I know you've got to go to a vote. How do
you see the future of this, of what's going to
happen here?

Vucanovich: [Sighs] You know, I don't know.

Seney: Let me say the tape won't pick this up, that
they can't hear the sigh. You kind of let out
a big sigh. You're not optimistic? That was
kind of a not-optimistic sigh.

“ . . . I think if you’re talking about changing the minds of the people, the water users in Fallon, I don’t know of anything that will change their mind. . . .”

Vucanovich: Well, you know, I think if you’re talking about changing the minds of the people, the water users in Fallon, I don’t know of anything that will change their mind.

“They feel that they have been abused by the government, they have been made a lot of promises, they have given as much as they think they can. . . . I certainly don’t think any more legislation is in the cards. They have talked so many times about filing suit. Well, they’ve lost the suits in every court, I think, that there is, so what are they going to file suit against . . .”

They feel that they have been abused by the government, they have been made a lot of promises, they have given as much as they

think they can. If you're saying are they going to accept, I don't think so. So I don't see a lot of changes. I just don't know.

I certainly don't think any more legislation is in the cards. They have talked so many times about filing suit. Well, they've lost the suits in every court, I think, that there is, so what are they going to file suit against, or what are they going to do?

Seney: Did they come see you after these last negotiations?

Vucanovich: Yes. They were here like the next day.
(laughter) Or shortly thereafter.

Seney: What were they saying to you?

“‘Well, we still want to be part of this equation. We want to get this solved.’ Well, they just didn’t like the things that were being said and that were being proposed or that were happening. . . . They really want to solve it, but they kind of want it to go their way, and that’s one of the problems. . . .”

Vucanovich: They were saying, “Well, we still want to be part of this equation. We want to get this solved.” Well, they just didn’t like the things that were being said and that were being proposed or that were happening. But they want to be part of it. They really want to solve it, but they kind of want it to go their way, and that’s one of the problems.

Seney: I guess a person like yourself must kind of lose patience after a while.

Vucanovich: Well, when you're here as long as I've been, you don't lose a lot of patience. You still try and listen to them. There are still people who are making their livelihoods on the land. And I think that we have gone more than the extra mile by getting my staff involved. Everybody that has ever worked for me has tried to help with it. But I still have a lot of compassion for them. It worries me.

Seney: I really appreciate you taking this time.

Vucanovich: Well, I'm glad to do that.

Seney: On behalf of the Bureau, I really thank you.

Vucanovich: I'm glad I was able to do it.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. NOVEMBER 9, 1995.

END OF INTERVIEW.